

five o'clock, and Sibyl had to lie down for a couple of hours before acting. Jim insisted that she should do so. He said that he would sooner part with her when their mother was not present. She would be sure to make a scene, and he detested scenes of every kind.

In Sibyl's own room they parted. There was jealousy in the lad's heart, and a fierce, murderous hatred of the stranger who, as it seemed to him, had come between them. Yet, when her arms were flung round his neck, and her fingers strayed through his hair, he softened, and kissed her with real affection. There were tears in his eyes as he went downstairs.

His mother was waiting for him below. She grumbled at his unpunctuality, as he entered. He made no answer, but sat down to his meagre meal. The flies buzzed round the table, and crawled over the stained cloth. Through the rumble of omnibuses, and the clatter of street cabs, he could hear the droning voice devouring each minute that was left to him.

After some time, he thrust away his plate, and put his head in his hands. He felt that he had a right to know. It should have been told to him before, if it was as he suspected. Laden with fear, his mother watched him. Words dropped mechanically from her lips. A tattered lace handkerchief twitched in her fingers. When the clock struck six, he got up, and went to the door. Then he turned back, and looked at her. Their eyes met. In hers he saw a wild appeal for mercy. It enraged him.

"Mother, I have something to ask you," he said.

Her eyes wandered vaguely about the room. She made no answer.

"Tell me the truth. I have a right to know. Were you

married to my father? **

She heaved a deep sigh. It was a sigh of relief. The terrible

moment, the moment that night and day, for weeks and months,

she had dreaded, had come at last, and yet she felt no terror.

Indeed in some measure it was a disappointment to her. The

vulgar directness of the question called for a direct answer.

The situation had not been gradually led up to. It was crude.

It reminded her of a bad rehearsal. "No," she answered, wondering at the harsh simplicity of

life.

"My father was a scoundrel then?" cried the lad, clenching

his fists.

She shook her head. "I knew he was not free. We loved

each other very much. If he had lived, he would have made